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ABSTRACT

Sex-linked differences were examined with respect to: (1) Kansas State University undergraduates' recollection of single experiences that they considered most important in their moral development; and (2) undergraduates' perceptions of the moral lessons learned as a result of those experiences. Although the 517 (244 males and 273 females) subjects ranged in age from 17 to 44 years, most were 20-years-old or younger. Data were collected on several measures, including the BEM Sex-Role Inventory and a rating instrument assessing the extent to which various moral lessons had been learned as a result of the experience. Findings offered some support for Gilligan's contention that justice orientations and concern for others orientations are alternative, sex-linked moral perspectives. Some sex differences were found in subjects' tendencies to cite particular experiences as having been most important in their moral development. Factor analysis of subjects' responses yielded justice issues and concern for others factors. Females indicated that they had learned a moral lesson that was more related to concern for others than that learned by the males. Results recommend the method used, rather than exclusive reliance on inquiries about hypothetical dilemmas. (RH)

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The Role of Single Experiences in Moral Development: Implications for "Justice" and "Concern for Others" Orientations

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THE ONGOING DEBATE REGARDING GENDER DIFFERENCES IN MORAL JUDGMENT IS MOST CLEARLY HIGHLIGHTED BY THE CONTRASTING VIEWS OF KOHLBERG AND GILLIGAN. WHEREAS KOHLBERG DESCRIBED MORAL DEVELOPMENT AS A PROGRESSION TOWARD ABSTRACT JUSTICE REASONING, GILLIGAN ARGUES THAT (A) KOHLBERG'S "JUSTICE" ORIENTED THEORY REFLECTS A PREDOMINATELY "MALE" CONCEPTUALIZATION OF MORALITY, AND (B) A "CONCERN FOR OTHERS" REPRESENTS A CONTRASTING, MORE "FEMALE", ORIENTATION TO MORALITY. RESEARCH ASSESSING THE ROLE PLAYED BY GENDER IN MORAL DEVELOPMENT, HOWEVER, HAS YIELDED INCONSISTENT SUPPORT FOR GILLIGAN'S ASSERTION.

ALTHOUGH NUMEROUS STUDIES HAVE EXAMINED THE ROLE PLAYED BY GENDER IN THE RESOLUTION OF VARIOUS HYPOTHETICAL MORAL DILEMMAS, LITTLE ATTENTION HAS BEEN GIVEN TO THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG GENDER, SEX-ROLE IDENTIFICATION, AND ACTUAL EXPERIENCES PERCEIVED AS HAVING BEEN IMPORTANT IN INDIVIDUALS' MORAL DEVELOPMENT. THE PURPOSE OF THE PRESENT STUDY WAS TO EXAMINE SEX-LINKED DIFFERENCES WITH RESPECT TO (A) THE RECOLLECTION OF SINGLE EXPERIENCES THAT WERE CONSIDERED MOST IMPORTANT IN INDIVIDUALS' MORAL DEVELOPMENT, AND (B) PERCEPTIONS OF THE MORAL LESSONS LEARNED AS A RESULT OF THOSE EXPERIENCES.

SUBJECTS. A TOTAL OF 517 UNDERGRADUATES (244 MALES AND 273 FEMALES) ENROLLED IN THE GENERAL PSYCHOLOGY COURSE AT KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY PARTICIPATED IN THE STUDY. ALTHOUGH THE SUBJECTS RANGED IN AGE FROM 17-44 YEARS OLD, A LARGE MAJORITY WERE 20 YEARS OF AGE OR YOUNGER. SUBJECTS WERE RUN IN GROUPS OF 20-25 AND RECEIVED COURSE CREDIT FOR THEIR PARTICIPATION.

MATERIALS. SUBJECTS WERE ASKED TO COMPLETE A BRIEF SERIES OF QUESTIONNAIRES. THE FIRST QUESTIONNAIRE, THE BEM SEX-ROLE INVENTORY (BSRI), WAS USED TO ASSESS THE SEX-ROLE ORIENTATION OF THE SUBJECTS. ON THE SECOND QUESTIONNAIRE, THE SUBJECTS WERE ASKED TO WRITE AN ESSAY DESCRIBING THE ONE EXPERIENCE THEY CONSIDERED AS HAVING BEEN THE MOST IMPORTANT IN THEIR MORAL DEVELOPMENT. [IN A PRELIMINARY STUDY INVOLVING 81 MALES AND 73 FEMALE UNDERGRADUATES, CLASSIFICATION OF THE GENERAL THEMES EXPRESSED IN SUBJECTS' ESSAYS (E.G., DEATH OF A SIGNIFICANT OTHER) YIELDED THE 16 MORAL EXPERIENCE CATEGORIES USED IN THIS STUDY, SEE TABLE 1.]

AFTER ALL SUBJECTS HAD COMPLETED THEIR ESSAYS, THEY WERE ASKED TO INDICATE THEIR APPROXIMATE AGE WHEN THE EVENT HAD OCCURRED. PARTICIPANTS WERE ALSO ASKED TO INDICATE WHETHER, AT THE TIME OF THE OCCURRENCE, THEY HAD CONSIDERED THE EVENT (A) PRIMARILY A GOOD EXPERIENCE, (B) PRIMARILY A BAD EXPERIENCE, (C) NEITHER A GOOD NOR BAD EXPERIENCE, OR (D) BOTH A GOOD AND BAD EXPERIENCE.

FINALLY, SUBJECTS WERE ASKED TO RATE (ON 7-POINT SCALES) THE EXTENT TO WHICH VARIOUS MORAL LESSONS HAD BEEN LEARNED AS A RESULT OF THE EXPERIENCE. FACTOR ANALYSIS OF RESPONSES TO THE "LESSON LEARNED" QUESTIONNAIRE IN THE PRELIMINARY STUDY YIELDED TWO FACTORS. FACTOR 1 (JUSTICE ISSUES) INCLUDED MORAL LESSONS INVOLVING THE RIGHTS OF OTHERS, JUSTICE, THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RIGHT AND WRONG, A SOCIAL ISSUE, AND SOCIETY. FACTOR 2 (CONCERN FOR OTHERS) INCORPORATED MORAL LESSONS CONCERNING CARING FOR OTHERS, INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS, RESPONSIBILITY TO OTHERS, AND FRIENDSHIP.

Results

TWO INDIVIDUALS INDEPENDENTLY ASSIGNED THE SUBJECTS' ESSAYS TO ONE OF THE 16 MORAL EXPERIENCE CATEGORIES. INTERRATER AGREEMENT IN ASSIGNMENT TO CATEGORIES WAS 71.4%; DISAGREEMENTS WERE RESOLVED THROUGH DISCUSSION. TABLE 1 PRESENTS THE NUMBER (AND PERCENTAGE) OF MALES AND FEMALES WHO WROTE ESSAYS THAT WERE ASSIGNED TO EACH OF THE 16 MORAL EXPERIENCE CATEGORIES. [THE "TOP 9" MORAL EXPERIENCE CATEGORIES (I.E., THOSE CITED BY AT LEAST 10 MALES AND 10 FEMALES) COMPRISED 78.7% OF ALL RESPONSES AND ARE CONSIDERED SEPARATELY IN AN ANALYSIS REPORTED LATER.] EXPERIENCES CITED FREQUENTLY AND APPROXIMATELY EQUALLY BY BOTH MALE AND FEMALE SUBJECTS INCLUDED THOSE INVOLVING (1) STEALING, LYING, CHEATING, AND OTHER INTENTIONAL TRANSGRESSIONS, (2) CHALLENGING EXPERIENCES AND TRANSITIONS (SUCH AS BEGINNING SCHOOL AND MOVING TO A NEW NEIGHBORHOOD AS A CHILD), (3) A RELIGIOUS RITUAL OR EVENT, AND (4) DATING AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS. WITH REGARD TO GENDER DIFFERENCES, MORAL EXPERIENCES MORE FREQUENTLY CITED BY MALES THAN FEMALES INCLUDED THOSE INVOLVING (1) DEATH OF A SIGNIFICANT OTHER AND (2) SPORTS AND COMPETITION. EXPERIENCES MORE FREQUENTLY CITED BY FEMALES THAN MALES INCLUDED THOSE INVOLVING (1) DIVORCE, (2) NEGATIVE SOCIAL EXPERIENCES (E.G., AN ARGUMENT, GOSSIP, OR PREJUDICE DIRECTED TOWARD ANOTHER INDIVIDUAL) AND (3) NEGATIVE SEXUAL EXPERIENCES (INCLUDING RAPE, UNWANTED PREGNANCY, AND ABORTION).

17.0% OF THE SUBJECTS INDICATED THAT THE EXPERIENCE MOST IMPORTANT IN THEIR MORAL DEVELOPMENT HAD OCCURRED BETWEEN 3 AND 7 YEARS OF AGE; PERCENTAGES FOR THE 8-12 YEAR OLD, 13-17 YEAR OLD, AND 18 YEAR OLD AND ABOVE AGE RANGE GROUPS WERE 24.7%, 47.3%, AND 11.0%, RESPECTIVELY. THIS "AGE OF EVENT" PATTERN WAS FOUND TO BE HIGHLY SIMILAR FOR BOTH MALE AND FEMALE SUBJECTS. THE ONLY MORAL EXPERIENCE CATEGORIES THAT DIFFERED MARKEDLY FROM THIS "AGE OF EVENT" PATTERN WERE (A) STEALING, LYING, CHEATING, AND OTHER INTENTIONAL TRANSGRESSIONS, AND (B) SINGLE EXPERIENCES WITH A PARENT. IN BOTH CASES, APPROXIMATELY 75% OF THE EXPERIENCES WERE REPORTED TO HAVE OCCURRED BY 12 YEARS OF AGE.

FACTOR ANALYSIS OF THE SUBJECTS' RESPONSES TO THE "LESSONS LEARNED" QUESTIONNAIRE REVEALED THAT THE SAME MORAL LESSONS LOADED ON THE SAME TWO FACTORS (I.E., JUSTICE ISSUES AND CONCERN FOR OTHERS) AS IN THE PRELIMINARY STUDY. AN INITIAL 2 (SEX OF SUBJECT) X 2 (FACTOR) ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE ON THE ENTIRE SAMPLE REVEALED SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS OF SEX OF SUBJECT, FACTOR, AND SEX OF SUBJECT X FACTOR, Fs (1, 513) = 4.36, 49.17, AND 8.85, RESPECTIVELY, Ps < .05. ALTHOUGH MALES (M = 4.47) AND FEMALES (M = 4.43) DID NOT DIFFER SIGNIFICANTLY IN THEIR TENDENCIES TO REPORT HAVING LEARNED

A MORAL LESSON INVOLVING "JUSTICE ISSUES", FEMALES REPORTED HAVING LEARNED A MORAL LESSON INVOLVING "CONCERN FOR OTHERS" (M = 5.22) TO A GREATER EXTENT THAN DID MALES (M = 4.78). IN CONTRAST TO THIS PATTERN INVOLVING GENDER, NO CONSISTENT RELATION WAS FOUND BETWEEN SUBJECTS' SCORES ON THE TWO "LESSONS LEARNED" FACTORS AND THEIR SCORES ON THE MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY SCALES OF THE BSRI.

IN ORDER TO EXAMINE THE EXTENT TO WHICH DIFFERENT MORAL EXPERIENCES MAY BE ASSOCIATED WITH THE LEARNING OF DIFFERENT MORAL LESSONS, SUBJECTS' "JUSTICE ISSUES" SCORES AND "CONCERN FOR OTHERS" SCORES WERE ANALYZED IN A 2 (SEX OF SUBJECT) X 2 (FACTOR) X 9 (MORAL EXPERIENCE CATEGORY) ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE (ONLY THE "TOP 9" CATEGORIES WERE INCLUDED IN THIS ANALYSIS BECAUSE THE NUMBER OF MALE AND/OR FEMALES REPORTING EXPERIENCES IN THE REMAINING CATEGORIES WAS QUITE SMALL). IN ADDITION TO DUPLICATING THE SIGNIFICANT SEX OF SUBJECT X FACTOR INTERACTION FOUND IN THE "FULL SAMPLE" ANALYSIS (REPORTED ABOVE), THIS ANOVA YIELDED SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS OF CATEGORY AND CATEGORY X FACTOR, Fs (8, 387) = 7.16 AND 15.17, RESPECTIVELY, PS < .001. SUBSEQUENT ANOVAs CONDUCTED SEPARATELY FOR EACH OF THE MORAL EXPERIENCE CATEGORIES REVEALED SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS OF FACTOR FOR SIX OF THE NINE CATEGORIES. AS PRESENTED IN TABLE 2, THE SUBJECTS REPORTED HAVING LEARNED MORE OF A MORAL LESSON INVOLVING "CONCERN FOR OTHERS" THAN "JUSTICE ISSUES" IN FIVE OF THE NINE MORAL CATEGORIES. THE ONLY EXPERIENCES FOR WHICH THE SUBJECTS REPORTED HAVING LEARNED MORE OF A MORAL LESSON INVOLVING "JUSTICE ISSUES" THAN "CONCERN FOR OTHERS" INCLUDED THOSE INVOLVING STEALING, LYING, CHEATING, AND OTHER INTENTIONAL TRANSGRESSIONS. FOR THREE OF THE MORAL EXPERIENCE CATEGORIES, THE SUBJECTS' SCORES FOR THE TWO "LESSONS LEARNED" FACTORS DID NOT DIFFER SIGNIFICANTLY FROM ONE ANOTHER.

FROM THE FULL SAMPLE OF 517 SUBJECTS, 173 MALES (71.2%) AND 202 FEMALES (74.0%) INDICATED THAT, AT THE TIME OF THE OCCURRENCE, THEY CONSIDERED THE EVENT (A) PRIMARILY A GOOD EXPERIENCE OR (B) PRIMARILY A BAD EXPERIENCE. OF THE SUBJECTS WHO MADE A CLEAR GOOD-BAD JUDGMENT, A MAJORITY OF MALES (N = 104; 60.1%) AND FEMALES (N = 139; 68.8%) INDICATED THAT THEY HAD CONSIDERED THE EVENT PRIMARILY A BAD EXPERIENCE. A 2 (SEX OF SUBJECT) X 2 (LESSON LEARNED FACTOR) X 2 (EVALUATION OF EVENT: GOOD VS BAD) ANOVA REVEALED A SIGNIFICANT EFFECT OF EVALUATION OF EVENT, F (1, 370) = 14.79, P < .001 (OVERALL "LESSONS LEARNED" MEANS FOR "GOOD" AND "BAD" EXPERIENCES WERE 5.02 AND 4.59, RESPECTIVELY).

SOME SUPPORT WAS FOUND FOR GILLIGAN'S CONTENTION THAT "JUSTICE" AND "CONCERN FOR OTHERS" ORIENTATIONS ARE ALTERNATIVE, SEX-LINKED MORAL PERSPECTIVES. ALTHOUGH THERE WAS CONSIDERABLE OVERLAP IN THE RESPONSES OF MALES AND FEMALES, SOME SEX DIFFERENCES WERE FOUND IN SUBJECTS' TENDENCIES TO CITE PARTICULAR EXPERIENCES AS HAVING BEEN MOST IMPORTANT IN THEIR MORAL DEVELOPMENT. FACTOR ANALYSIS OF SUBJECTS' RESPONSES TO THE "LESSON LEARNED" QUESTIONNAIRE YIELDED THE SAME TWO FACTORS (I.E., "JUSTICE ISSUES" AND "CONCERN FOR OTHERS") AS IN THE PRELIMINARY STUDY; FURTHERMORE, FEMALES INDICATED THAT THEY GENERALLY HAD LEARNED MORE OF A "CONCERN FOR OTHERS" MORAL LESSON FROM THEIR CRITICAL EXPERIENCE THAN DID MALES.

IN ADDITION TO THE FINDINGS RELEVANT TO THE KOHLBERG-GILLIGAN DEBATE, THE PRESENT RESULTS SUGGEST THAT A FULLER UNDERSTANDING OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT MAY BE ACHIEVED THROUGH ASKING INDIVIDUALS ABOUT THEIR OWN MORAL EXPERIENCES AND DILEMMAS RATHER THAN RELYING EXCLUSIVELY ON INQUIRIES ABOUT PREDETERMINED, HYPOTHETICAL DILEMMAS. FOR EXAMPLE, IT APPEARS NOTEWORTHY THAT, ALTHOUGH INDIVIDUALS' "MOST IMPORTANT MORAL EXPERIENCES" OCCURRED ACROSS A WIDE AGE RANGE, 13 TO 17 YEARS OF AGE WAS THE MOST FREQUENTLY CITED PERIOD FOR THESE EXPERIENCES. IN ADDITION, WHEREAS SUBJECTS TENDED TO CITE MORE BAD THAN GOOD EXPERIENCES AS HAVING BEEN MOST IMPORTANT IN THEIR MORAL DEVELOPMENT, THEY INDICATED THAT THEY GENERALLY HAD LEARNED MORE FROM GOOD THAN BAD EXPERIENCES. FUTURE RESEARCH SHOULD CONTINUE TO EXAMINE INDIVIDUALS' PERCEPTIONS OF NATURALLY OCCURRING MORAL EXPERIENCES IN ORDER TO GAIN A FULLER UNDERSTANDING OF THE DEVELOPMENT AND EXPRESSION OF INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN MORAL JUDGMENT.

Table 1

MORAL EXPERIENCE CATEGORY	MALES	FEMALES
*A. RELIGIOUS RITUAL OR EVENT	22 (9.0%)	31 (11.4%)
*B. STEALING, LYING, CHEATING AND OTHER INTENTIONAL TRANSGRESSIONS	38 (15.6%)	34 (12.5%)
*C. DEATH OF A SIGNIFICANT OTHER	27 (11.1%)	15 (5.5%)
*D. DATING AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS	19 (7.8%)	21 (7.7%)
E. NEGATIVE SEXUAL EXPERIENCES (INCLUDING RAPE, UNWANTED PREGNANCY, AND ABORTION)	5 (2.0%)	23 (8.4%)
*F. CHALLENGING EXPERIENCES AND TRANSITIONS (E.G., BEGINNING SCHOOL, MOVING TO A NEW NEIGHBORHOOD AS A CHILD)	29 (11.9%)	27 (9.9%)
*G. DRINKING/DRUG USE OR ABUSE	13 (5.3%)	17 (6.2%)
H. DIVORCE	5 (2.0%)	15 (5.5%)
*I. POSITIVE SOCIAL EXPERIENCES (E.G., DEVELOPING FRIENDSHIPS, CONVERSATION/INTERACTION WITH OTHER)	18 (7.4%)	14 (5.1%)
J. MORAL DEVELOPMENT AS A PROCESS	10 (4.1%)	2 (.7%)
*K. NEGATIVE SOCIAL EXPERIENCES (E.G., AN ARGUMENT, GOSSIP, OR PREJUDICE DIRECTED TOWARD ANOTHER INDIVIDUAL)	15 (6.1%)	36 (13.2%)
L. SPORTS AND COMPETITION	10 (4.1%)	5 (1.8%)
M. ACCIDENTS NOT INVOLVING DEATH	7 (2.9%)	8 (2.9%)
N. EXPERIENCES RELEVANT TO PHYSICAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH NOT INVOLVING DEATH (E.G., SUICIDE ATTEMPT)	4 (1.6%)	11 (4.0%)
*O. SINGLE EXPERIENCES WITH PARENT (E.G., A DISCUSSION, OBSERVATION OF PARENT'S MORAL/IMMORAL BEHAVIOR)	18 (7.4%)	13 (4.8%)
P. PERSONAL SETBACK (E.G., A FAILING GRADE, LOST JOB)	4 (1.6%)	1 (.4%)

*THE "TOP 9" MORAL EXPERIENCES CATEGORIES (I.E., THOSE CITED BY AT LEAST 10 MALES AND 10 FEMALES; SEE TABLE 2)

Table 2

	"TOP 9" MORAL EXPERIENCE CATEGORIES								
LESSON LEARNED FACTOR	A	B	C	D	F	G	I	K	O
JUSTICE ISSUES	5.10^{A}	4.99^{B}	3.70^{A}	4.26^{A}	4.11^{A}	4.35^{A}	4.33^{A}	4.97^{A}	4.17^{A}
CONCERN FOR OTHERS	5.50^{B}	3.93^{A}	5.31^{B}	6.22^{B}	4.81^{B}	4.49^{A}	5.40^{B}	5.13^{A}	4.30^{A}

NOTE. MEANS IN THE SAME COLUMN THAT HAVE A DIFFERENT SUPERSCRIPT DIFFER AT $P < .05$.